
Conference on Disarmament

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English
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The Presidency

Working paper

Ideas for consideration

1. During the informal consultations held by the President based, first, on informal bilateral contacts with certain members, and secondly, on the “non-paper” submitted to all members for reflection, it has become clear that there is no agreement to move forward with the items on the Conference’s agenda. The President believes that any possible consensus is past the stage of a drafting exercise. There is no agreement in sight.
2. During this process, it has also become clear that views are divided as to the future of the Conference on Disarmament. On the one hand, some members have underscored the Conference’s ongoing value as the sole multilateral forum for disarmament negotiations, whereas others question the very *raison d’être* of this body, because it has been deadlocked for 15 years. The reality, which affects all of us, is that the Conference and its very foundations are being gravely eroded by its continued failure to achieve results, as evidenced by the lack of a programme of work that would enable us to get back to our substantive work. For many, a programme of work is unnecessary. The lack of agreement on a programme of work has meant that there have been no discussions on which to base negotiations.
3. On the other hand, during the consultations it has become apparent that some participants are leaning towards linking the Conference with the fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT), whereas in reality, they are two separate entities, the second existing independently of the first. For a number of members, the negotiation within the Conference of a FMCT would evidently be the optimal result. This is fairly unlikely to occur under existing circumstances, however, especially in view of the security requirements of one or more States.
4. For this reason, the Conference on Disarmament must be able to function without the FMCT: otherwise, its members will be collectively taken hostage, since the lack of consensus on one issue blocks progress on any of the others.
5. The FMCT has undoubtedly wormed its way into the Conference’s very fabric and is refusing to come out; new ideas are needed in order to overcome the paralysis and immobility, but for this, we must move away a little bit from the Conference’s core issues and look at everything from a new perspective.

6. International security requirements and global disarmament are undoubtedly more important than the four items on the Conference's agenda, and it is there that we must seek a way out of the impasse.
7. With this in mind, the President invites you to reflect on the following:
 - (a) If we are optimistic and believe that the Conference has a lasting future, should we not acknowledge that its chronic lack of productivity endangers its credibility and existence?
 - (b) If the lack of productivity is attributable to external circumstances (for example, the current security climate), would it not be better to acknowledge this and decide to put the Conference on standby until a political solution emerges?
 - (c) If the majority of the Conference's members accept that it will be difficult to come to an agreement that would permit a programme of work to be adopted this year, would it not be better for the Conference to convene only for a short period, until the political climate improves?
 - (d) If it is true that our fixation on the four main items on our agenda prevents us from achieving our goals of international security and disarmament, why not request the General Assembly to convene, once and for all, its fourth special session devoted to disarmament in order to review the whole machinery, as many States have suggested?
 - (e) Over the past 15 years we have repeated ad nauseam that the Conference was set up to negotiate, not simply to discuss disarmament topics; nevertheless, we have devoted ourselves, year after year, to debating the programme of work as the central issue.
8. Let us then ask ourselves whether it would not have been more productive to discuss the topics in question, whether this would not have brought us closer to achieving our goals and to negotiations on some of the issues.
9. We would then be able to expand the Conference's discussions in the hope of finding common ground that would enable us to move forward.
10. With a view to addressing these and other existential questions, the President is proposing to hold a series of plenary meetings for frank and honest discussions on the future of this body with all its members.
